

Peter Skerry
Professor, Claremont McKenna College and Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution
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As you ponder California's response to the largest influx of immigrants in its history, I would urge the members of this commission to consider exactly what it is we Americans expect from Assimilation. We tend to assume that assimilation is a single process that moves in a clear direction and that results in social harmony and peace. In my view, none of these common assumptions about assimilation is accurate.

First, assimilation is not simply a single process. It is multi-dimensional. We can and do talk about the economic assimilation of immigrants, but also about their linguistic, social, and cultural assimilation. We might also address their political assimilation. Moreover, each of these dimensions of assimilation has its own logic and dynamics. And just because a group is assimilating economically does not mean that it is assimilating socially or culturally. And if it is assimilating culturally, this does not mean that it is necessarily assimilating politically.

Second, assimilation does not necessarily have a clear, definitive end-point. If for example we focus on the cultural assimilation of immigrants, it is often the case that the children and grand-children of immigrants are seemingly less accepting of the dominant society's values and institutions than their parents are. Yet this does not mean that these second- and third-generations are not Assimilating. It may in fact mean that they have adopted the values of the dominant society and are applying them in ways that their parents and grand-parents would never have dreamed of.

Finally, assimilation does not necessarily lead to social harmony and consensus. In fact, it often leads to conflict, which surprises us and makes us uncomfortable. For example, I would point to the demands Latinos make for affirmative action, voting rights, and other such Group rights not as evidence that they are refusing to assimilate, as many Americans clearly feel, but that Latinos are in fact assimilating. This does not mean I am uncritical of such demands by Latinos. I have in fact been quite critical of them. But I do not criticize such goals as evidence that Latinos reject assimilation. Rather I regard them as an indicator that Latinos have adapted to contemporary political institutions, which have been importantly shaped by the civil rights movement and other changes since the 1960s. Indeed, our political institutions today encourage Latinos to define their interests in terms of group rights; hence, doing so reflects their *political* assimilation.

In other words, when it comes to assimilation, we have to be clear about what it is we are seeking. For we may not like what it is we believe we want.